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Organizer: Robin O’Bryan, University of Virginia
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Session II. Black Africans, Magian Dwarfs, and Flamboyant Jesters in Early Modern Art

This session deals with representations of the cultural “Other” in early modern art. Focusing on the depiction of Saint Maurice and a Magus in the guise of black Africans, the first paper examines altarpieces made in different regions of German-speaking Europe that fuse the two African identities. To explain the reasons for this curious pictorial phenomenon, the investigation considers other instances of the doubling of black characters in European art. The second paper examines the widespread use of the dwarf motif in Italian imagery illustrating the Procession and Adoration of the Magi. Establishing the importance of the cult of the Magi, the discussion shows how in addition to being portrayed as royal attendants, dwarfs were represented as foreigners, depicted with monstrous physical features, and garbed in clothing that hinted at their societal role as fools and jesters. The third panelist examines the motif of the jester/fool figure as it appears in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Netherlandish art. Focusing on aspects of dress, the analysis brings in the ideology of men’s fashion to posit links with cross-dressing in theater and Carnival activities.

Chair: Susan Maxwell, Professor, University of Wisconsin—Oshkosh
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Bio: Susan Maxwell is Professor of Art History in the Department of Art the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, specializing in Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque art history with an interest in the history of prints, drawings, and theories of collecting and display. In addition to a 2011 monograph, *The Court Art of Friedrich Sustris: Patronage in Late Renaissance Bavaria*, more recent publications include “Graphic Diplomacy: Drawings and Prints in the Collections of the Late Renaissance Court of Wittelsbach Bavaria” (2023), “Maximilian I of Bavaria” in *Bellum et Artes* (2021), “Artful Negotiator: Peter Paul Rubens’ Intervention in the Cause of Catholic Bavaria” (2019), and “Lazy Foreigners and Indignant Locals” (2017). She has been a DAAD research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science and the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, and an Honorary Fellow at the Historisches Kolleg Munich.

Speakers:

Speaker 1. Paul Kaplan, Professor of Art History, Purchase College, State University of New York
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Title: Surplus Blackness: The African Maurice and the African Magus in German and Danish Altarpieces

Abstract: Medieval German artists created two of the most notable and enduring Black characters in European visual art: the Black African manifestation of the Egyptian soldier saint Maurice, and the Black African Wise Man in the immensely popular subject of the Adoration of Magi. However, these iconographical innovations were initiated in different centuries and in different regions of German-speaking Europe. Nevertheless, in the fifteenth, sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, there are about a dozen cases in which altarpieces include both Black, saintly characters, and this presentation will analyze the circumstances which led these two separately conceived motifs to merge, in works from northeastern Germany, Denmark, and the eastern Baltic. To properly frame this phenomenon, other instances of the doubling of Black characters will also be considered.

Bio: Paul H. D. Kaplan is Professor and Chair of Art History at Purchase College, SUNY. He is the author of *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (1985) and of numerous essays on European images of black Africans and Jews. He served as Project Scholar for the artist Fred Wilson's "Speak of Me as I Am," an installation in the American Pavilion at the 2003 Venice Biennale. In 2008 and 2012 he was a fellow of the Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard University. He is a major contributor to volumes 2, 3 and 4 of Harvard University Press's *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (new ed., 2010-2012). His recent book, *Contraband Guides: Race, Transatlantic Culture and the Arts in the Civil War Era* (Penn State Press, 2020), extends his research into the nineteenth century and American art and literature.

Speaker 2: Robin O'Bryan, Independent Scholar,
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Title: Dwarfs as Magian Attendants in Italian Renaissance Iconography

Abstract: The cult of the Magi that flourished in Renaissance Italy was celebrated with festive pageants and imagery depicting the Procession and Adoration of the three kings. Honoring the words of the thirteenth-century bishop who allowed that since the Magi were indeed royals it was fitting that they be accompanied by a grand entourage, artists responded in kind. In frescoes, paintings, sculptural reliefs, and altarpieces the fashionable dwarf motif was inserted into the scene accompanied by princely accouterments including horses, greyhounds, falcons, monkeys, and other exotic animals. While the mere presence of the dwarf in these Magian scenarios served as a symbol of prestige for the patrons of these works, the way the dwarf was portrayed often hinted at their less-than savory affiliations. As well as being depicted in the guise of foreigners, dwarfs were sometimes portrayed with monstrous physical characteristics and outfitted in garments that evoked the costumes of fools and jesters. This paper examines the development of the dwarf motif in Magian imagery, showing how artists manipulated the dwarf figure to reinforce his status as a cultural Other, at once a princely status symbol, but also firmly wedded to the underbelly of Renaissance society.

Bio: Robin O'Bryan (PhD, University of Virginia) is an art historian specializing in the art of the Italian Renaissance, with a particular interest in issues related to the subculture, parody, and especially dwarfs. Her published articles have appeared in journals such as *The Art Bulletin*, *Source*, *The Medal*, *Preternature*, and the *SECAC Review*, and in anthologies including *The Routledge Companion to Art and Disability*, and a volume on *Games and Game Playing in Early Modern Art and Literature* which she edited for Amsterdam University Press (2019). She is currently serving as primary editor for a collection

of essays on Giants and Dwarfs in European Art and Culture, ca. 1350–1750: Real, Imagined, Metaphorical (forthcoming, Amsterdam University Press) and has recently completed an expansive study on dwarfs in Italian Renaissance art and culture.

Speaker 3. Martha Hollander, Professor of Art History, Hofstra University
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Title: Dress and Disorder: Jesters in Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish art

Abstract: I am investigating jesters and their dress in the seventeenth century, starting with an unusual group portrait by Gonzales Coques (1661). Coques depicts artists and poets at a meal, members of the Antwerp rhetorician society Olijftak (Olive Branch), of which he was a member. They are greeting another member, a man wearing—along with his everyday collar—the red-and-yellow striped gown of a jester. Like courts and households, rhetoricians’ societies employed jesters, or fools, as entertainers. This man’s garb, an amalgam of historical fantasy and contemporary fashion, marks him as an outsider: stripes signified otherness and criminality; bright colors indicated extravagance. Similar gowns appear elsewhere in Netherlandish depictions of fools. He is also feminized, carrying a handkerchief, a traditional attribute of women. Expressed in moralizing texts and sumptuary laws, the ideology of men’s fashion stressed a strict distinction between the genders, social classes, and national identities. This flamboyant figure amid a modern male company, like a lone woman in a comic genre scene, evokes, rather than imitates, cross-dressing. While cross-dressing was standard practice in rhetoricians’ theater, and indulged during Carnival, the jester’s liminal presence reveals how patriarchal social order is easily unsettled, if not disrupted, by dress.

Bio: Martha Hollander is Professor of Art History at Hofstra University. She is the author of *An Entrance for The Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art*, as well as essays on seventeenth-century Dutch art and culture, digital pedagogy, digital humanities, early modern fashion, and costume in art, film, and television. She is currently at work on a book about masculinity and fashion in seventeenth-century Holland.